

VZCZCXRO2859
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHNM #0374/01 1461334
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 261334Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5057
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3511
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0846
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000374

DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, AND DRL/EA
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/W
ACCRA ALSO FOR AF/WA
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [EIND](#) [KDEM](#) [EPET](#) [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#)
EAID, ETRD, TBIO, NG
SUBJECT: NIGER: POL/ECON UPDATE FOR APRIL 2009

NIAMEY 00000374 001.2 OF 002

¶1. The following is an Embassy Niger compilation of political and economic highlights for April 2009 not otherwise covered in mission reporting. This report covers the following issues:

- First Woman Appointed to National Assembly VP;
- Council of Ministers Seeks Parliamentary Reimbursements;
- High Commission Seeks Civic Education for Balloting;
- Petroleum Prices Re-set;
- Renewed ASECNA Strike Threat Looms;
- Arik Air Commences Service;
- Development Partners Discuss Future of Niger's North;
- Pres. Tandja Lays Cornerstone for Slaughterhouse;and
- Meningitis Update: 12,462 Cases, 501 Deaths to Date

First Woman Appointed to National Assembly VP

¶2. On March 30, the National Assembly renewed its executive board as provided by its bylaws. Major changes occurred within the National Movement for a Society of Development (MNSD) caucus, to reflect recent shuffles within the main party of the ruling coalition. As a result of what appears to be a purge of supporters of former PM Hama Amadou's supporters, Mariama Alhassane (MNSD) was elected First Vice President of the National Assembly, becoming the first woman to assume the second highest position in Niger's parliament. Alhassane replaced Issaka Hassane Djegoule (MNSD), a staunch supporter of former Prime Minister Hama Amadou. Mahamaou Zada (MNSD) was elected President of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Commission to replace Soumana Sanda (MNSD), the leader of the pro-Hama movement. Finally, Maman Ibrahim was elected President of the MNSD-PSDN caucus to replace Cisse Oumarou, another Hama supporter.

Council of Ministers Seeks Parliamentary Reimbursements

¶3. Based on the June 13, 2008 Constitutional Court's ruling, the Council of Ministers on April 1 decided to transmit a letter to the National Assembly requesting deputies to reimburse "sums unduly received as parliamentary allowances during the period of June through December 2008." By this request, each of the 113 deputies is expected to pay back about 7 million CFA (\$14,000). Although the Constitutional Court decided in December 2008 that the dramatically increased allowances were legal, the Council of Ministers maintains that receiving them prior to the Court's ruling was not legal, and is hence demanding that they be refunded for the time period following their initiation but before the Court's ruling. National Assembly Deputies have argued that reimbursing the GON for the

allowances would be understood as their having violated the constitution, a potential factor in this year's parliamentary elections.

High Commission Seeks Civic Education for Balloting

¶4. On April 20, the High Commission of Territorial Collectivities (HCCT), the GON's advisory body on decentralization and local governance, closed its first session for 2009. The HCCT made several recommendations to improve Niger's decentralization process. The session recommended that the GON support the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) in providing civic education on single ballot voting, which will be used for the first time in Niger's elections in 2009. The session further requested the GON to support local councils in direct tax collection and better coordination of technical and financial partners' interventions.

Petroleum Prices Re-set for April

¶5. The Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Normalization announced a drop in the retail price of diesel fuel from 492 CFA (USD 1.02) to 465 CFA (USD 0.96) per liter for April. The price of gasoline remains unchanged at 476 CFA (USD 0.99)/liter, but the price of kerosene dropped from 371 CFA (USD 0.77) to 351 CFA (USD 0.73) per liter. The government-established retail prices for hydrocarbons are valid nationwide and are adjusted monthly. (Exchange rate used is 480 FCFA = 1 USD.)

Renewed ASECNA Strike Threat Looms

¶6. On April 10-12, civil aviation and meteorology union members went on strike to press the GON to reduce income tax rates on their

NIAMEY 00000374 002.2 OF 002

salaries and allowances, which they claim range from 33 to 45 percent of their gross salary, including allowances. The strike blocked all air traffic to and from Niamey, except medical and humanitarian flights. On April 10, the Minister of Communication and Government Spokesperson Mohamed Ben Omar stated that the strike came at a time of foreign investment interest, and that taxes must conform to government regulations. He suggested that resolution may require legislative reforms. The unions did not find the government's argument compelling, and another job action may occur.

Arik Air Commences Service within Niger

¶7. On April 23, Arik Niger SA, a subsidiary of Arik Nigeria, offered an inaugural flight from Niamey to Zinder. The newly-formed airline plans to build gradually to offer flights from Niamey to domestic destinations to include Agadez, Tahaoua, Maradi, and Zinder, as well as international flights to Cotonou, Lagos, Kano, and Abuja. The airline has one Boeing 737 and two Fokker aircraft.

Development Partners Hold Meeting on Niger's North

¶8. On April 28, heads of donor agencies and members of the diplomatic community attended a conference at the French Embassy to discuss political and economic conditions in Niger's north, including the peace talks, banditry, land mines, and the reintegration of former rebels. The meeting also dealt with future donor cooperation and development projects in the region. Participants cited success in peace talks as encouraging for future work in the north, yet recognized the continued precarious situation along the Mali/Niger border, especially for Westerners. Those present underscored the importance of local elections, especially in Agadez.

Pres. Tandja Lays Cornerstone for Slaughterhouse

¶9. On April 10, President Tandja laid the cornerstone for a new

refrigerated slaughterhouse in Niamey's industrial zone. Financed by the GON at a level of 16B F CFA (\$33M), the project involves 18 months of construction by an Australian firm. When completed, the plant will be able to process 40 MT of meat annually for both domestic markets and export. It will also permit the processing of tallow and hides. The presentation emphasized that the facility will operate to meet both EU and USFDA standards.

Meningitis Update: 12,462 Cases, 501 Deaths to Date

¶10. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Niger has suffered no fewer than 12,462 cases of meningitis, resulting in at least 501 deaths - a mortality of four percent, as of May 17. The incidence of meningitis has dropped quickly as May progresses, although the malady hit Niger harder and earlier than in 2008. UNICEF, supported by the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), as well as other development partner efforts, has provided immunizations to prevent cases as well as antibiotics to treat the afflicted. The Ministry of Public Health posted several notices in newspapers pointing out that such immunizations are available to all free of charge.

¶11. Minimize considered.

Allen